

THE LEARNING CURVE

FIVE LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES FROM AAR ROLLUPS AUGUST 2003 – 5TH EDITION

PLANNING

Value of Contingency Planning

An Incident Management Team (IMT) worked closely with the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Deschutes County Fire and Sheriff's Offices on a July 2003 incident. Although the fire remained within U.S. Forest Service lands throughout the incident, the County initiated early contingency planning. Being very progressive in wildland fire preparation, Deschutes County had previously conducted numerous practice evacuations of large incidents. These simulations proved extremely helpful as contingency planning went very smoothly for this incident.

Lesson Learned: Deschutes County learned the value of performing live dry run evacuations after experiencing major wildland urban interface fires over the past several years. They have completed detailed contingency plans for six major subdivisions and communities on the edge of the forest boundary. On one recent dry run, they evacuated 5,000 residents in two hours. Counties and other jurisdictions should be encouraged to conduct practice simulations coordinated with all potentially involved government agencies. These practice evacuations are invaluable, not only to iron out bugs in response planning, but they also allow the various agency counterparts to interact with each other on a personal level before a real incident occurs. For more information on Deschutes County wildland fire mitigation projects go to: <http://impact.deschutes.org>.

OPERATIONS

Aircraft Manifesting Using Digital Scales

On a 2003 all-risk incident, the manifesting and loading process at a county airport took two to three hours per chartered jet aircraft flight. The operation employed the traditional methods for manifesting crews, which required a minimum of five staff in the "manifest room", the bus parking zone, and on the airport ramp to handle scales, tabulate the manifest, and direct crews. The staff weighed crew personnel individually, using a sliding beam "doctor's scale" and weighed each individual unit of cargo with a hanging compression scale. Every weight then had to be tallied manually and summed up on the Passenger

Manifest. This process required approximately 10 minutes to process 20 passengers (or 5 crews per hour.)

To improve both the efficiency and safety of this large-scale air operation, the Incident Management Team decided to rent two digital platform scales from a local source. One portable platform scale had a 2'x 2' platform and a 500 lb. capacity. A second platform scale had a 5'x 5' platform and a 5000 lb. capacity.

A company representative delivered and set up both scales. The large, 5000 lb. capacity scale was powered by 120 volt electrical service, and because it weighed over 800 lbs., it required six people to offload it and move it into the building. Six "C" cell batteries powered the smaller scale, which is mounted on wheels for easier transport. Rental costs for both units totaled about \$52.00 per day.

Air Support personnel expressed a greater preference for these digital scales over the older technology beam and compression scales and immediately began benefiting from them by being able to process personnel more quickly at a rate of up to seven crews per hour. At the same time, these digital scales reduced the need from five to three aviation support personnel in the "manifest room." A shortcoming with these rental scales was neither instrument could sum individual measurements to aggregate total crew weights, so manifesting still required manual calculation. However, since each crew requires a manifest listing individual weights, manual calculation was unavoidable. Neither rental scale had printing capabilities.

Lesson Learned: During large-scale airport mobilization and demobilization, digital platform scales are an effective and efficient means of processing and manifesting personnel. The scale with the 5' x 5' platform was larger than needed for personal gear and cargo, and was difficult to set up due to its weight. Digital scales are also available in 3' x 3' platform sizes and can be programmed for various weight capacities. A 2' x 2' personnel scale and 3' x 3' cargo/personal gear scale should satisfy most requirements. For more specific information on digital scales, do a search for "digital platform scales" on the Internet.

LOGISTICS/OPERATIONS

Mobile Spike Camps

A 2003 Montana wildfire constantly tested the Air Operations Branch and the Logistics Section during each operational period. Since ground transportation to the fire took several hours, the IMT had crews and supplies flown into six low impact spike camps located around the fire at approximately 1½-mile intervals. As resources completed sections of line, the spike camps were cleaned up and then relocated about every two days to meet upcoming operational objectives.

Lessons Learned: 1) To minimize exposure of personnel to helicopter operations, the crews walked out about three miles to a drop point from where they were driven back to base camp, having completed their multiple day assignments based out of the spike camps. Flying time and associated risks were cut in half for all the line personnel by using a flying in and hiking out procedure. 2) To facilitate smooth spike camp operations, a Receiving and Distribution Manager (RCDM) was ordered to work out of the main helibase. The RCDM coordinated orders of all cargo going to the six spike camps. By stationing the RCDM at the helibase it facilitated getting the cargo orders to the right place at the right time.

LOGISTICS

Security Badge System

With increasing security efforts to protect incident personnel, equipment and supplies that move through a base camp, the use of identification badges to identify incident personnel has become an increasingly important means of controlling access. The badges can be readily implemented to control access to other public safety, homeland security, supply distribution, and food handling facilities as well.

Lesson Learned: As incident personnel increase the use of identification badges, in-camp conflicts involving human resources, law enforcement, supply distribution, accountability, laundry, and contract crew/engine/water tender administration should also decrease. This effort should also improve the ability to reduce costs through better personnel, supply, and equipment accountability on the incident.

FINANCE

Incorporating Cost Measures

Agency Administrators are faced with many issues as they evaluate the most effective alternative for managing a fire on their forest, park or unit. Besides public safety and resource concerns, they must also consider fire suppression and wildland fire use costs.

Lesson Learned: Agency administrators and Incident Management Teams (IMT) have found that, if they engage in a partnership arrangement from the onset of the incident, the IMT can manage the incident in a cost effective manner consistent with the Agency Administrator's direction. Part of the early communication should involve a discussion of the cost containment objectives,

and how they will be measured. Without a working partnership in place, the IMT may find their expenditure decisions questioned by the Agency Administrator, and feel as if they are being micromanaged within their delegation of authority. Both the Agency Administrator and the IMT must communicate openly and honestly as part of their daily routine during all phases of the incident.